

When Negotiating, Look For Nonverbal Cues

Your mother probably taught you that it's rude to stare. But when you negotiate a business deal, close observation of your opponent makes sense.

By inspecting your opponent's every physical move, you can often determine whether he or she is holding something back or not telling the truth.

The key is not to stare so much that you make your opponent uncomfortable, but to be aware of his or her movements through casual glances and friendly eye contact. It will almost certainly give you an edge.

What should you look for? Experts who study body language suggest a two-step process. First, identify a subject's mannerisms during the initial, friendly stages of a discussion. As the negotiation unfolds, see whether your opponent suddenly adopts different behavior. "You have to watch people a long time to establish what their baseline mode is," said David Hayano, author of "Poker Faces." "Once you know how they normally behave, you may be able to tell when they start to put on an act." Hayano is a retired professor of anthropology at California State University at Northridge, who has analyzed the body language of poker players, and he's found that the rapport-building stage is a valuable time to study your opponent. Why? Because that's when you get to know someone's "natural" behavior. "If you are dealing with a very talkative executive who all of a sudden gets meek during the heat of the negotiation, then something strange is going on," he said. It may be a clue that your opponent is hiding something; other clues are exaggerated movements or excessive enthusiasm.

Hayano says that in poker, for example, a player who throws chips forcefully on the table or suddenly behaves in a brash, aggressive way may be masking his being stuck with a weak hand of cards. The same goes for executives who loudly and repeatedly proclaim that they're making a major concession, when in fact they're not giving up much. "When you're negotiating with someone who starts overtalking and backslapping, this can mean they really have little to offer," Hayano said.

A range of nonverbal clues may serve as red flags during a negotiation. Experts suggest paying special attention to a person's hands and face. "There are many revealing body signals that may indicate a hidden agenda," said Donald Moine, an organizational psychologist at the Association for

Human Achievement in Rolling Hills Estates, Calif. Examples include hair pulling, lip biting, eye blinking, gulping and throat clearing. According to Moine, a negotiator who starts breathing rapidly may not be telling the truth. "The way to

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tell how someone is breathing is to notice their shoulders," he said. "With more rapid breathing that's higher up in the chest, you will see their shoulders rise and fall a lot more than normal." When coaching executives to improve their negotiation skills, Moine finds that many of them miss opportunities to read others' body language. "They often make the mistake of looking down at papers instead of being observant," he said. The next time your opponent gestures for you to study a document or presents a written contract for you to scrutinize, don't fall for the bait. Instead of cutting off eye contact, Moine suggests that you say, "Tell me about it. What does it say?" As long as you keep your eyes on your negotiating partners, you can assess whether their nonverbal behavior conflicts with what they tell you.

Even the most experienced deal makers who know how to mask their expressions may still betray themselves with their bodies. "Watch for signs of deception," said Raymond McGraime, author of "Silent Seduction." "Deception is shown by such movements as covering of the mouth with the hands, rubbing the side of the nose, jerking the head quickly to the side, and leaning away from you. If these things occur when they're saying something critical to the negotiation, that's even more significant." Although these behaviors may simply result from nervous tics, McGraime warns that they can also expose a liar.

"When most people lie, they subconsciously want to apologize for it," he said. "They feel guilty for lying, and that shows in their nonverbal behavior." On a more positive note, body language can sometimes help you trust a speaker. Look for expansive, welcoming gestures that seem to flow naturally from the person's behavior. "When someone opens his palms towards simultaneously, that's a sign of openness and honesty," McGraime said. "The further the palms come out from their body, the better. In depictions of the great prophets, you see this. It's like saying, 'I have nothing up my sleeve.'"

Now that you know what to look for while negotiating, beware of attributing too much meaning to every little move your opponent makes. Resist drawing rash conclusions based on someone who suddenly starts scratching or acting jittery. "The danger of reading your opponent is that you lean too much on just one sign," said Richard Heslin, professor of psychology at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Ind. "But when you can put several things together, maybe there's something there that's worth paying attention to."

Body Aspects

Our body says a lot about us in many ways as we communicate. Body movement can indicate attitudes, and feelings while also acting as illustrators and regulators. Our body movement includes the heads, eyes, shoulders, lips, eyebrows, neck, legs, arms, fingers, orientation, hands and gestures. Together these pieces can convey if we're comfortable, unhappy, friendly, anxious, nervous and many other messages.

With so many parts conveying messages, you can see how easily things can get confused and how difficult it is to manipulate nonverbal communication. Just think of the different messages which are communicated through facing a person, touching, standing at various distances and in different stances. With careful thought, however, we may begin using our bodies to further our clarity and meaning.

This discussion has broken down body language into several areas: proxemics, appearance, eye contact, and physical behavior. We will continue by looking at each area.

Proxemics

Proxemics is the amount of space around or between us and others. How closely people position themselves to a person during a discussion communicates what type of relationship exists between the two people. This space and meaning differs from culture to culture but in American culture the following standards exist.

- 0-18 inches is intimate space reserved for family and close friends
- 18 inches to 4 feet is personal space used in most interpersonal interactions
- 4-12 feet is social-consultative space used in more formal interactions

Appearance

Appearance is a second important factor involved with nonverbal communication .

In today's society, the purpose of clothing has changed from fulfilling a need to expressing oneself. Teens use fashion to determine cliques such as prep, jock, punk, or gangster. Clothing communication is continued later in life by identifying someone in a suit as a businessperson, someone wearing a black robe as a judge, doctors wearing lab coats and stethoscopes or various other positions wearing required uniforms of dress. Adornments are another form of appearance. Wearing expensive jewelry communicates one message while wearing ceremonial ornaments communicates a completely different message. Appearance also takes into account personal grooming such as cleanliness, doing one's hair, nail trimming or wearing make-up.

Overall appearance is the nonverbal that people are most aware of and manipulate the most. Appearance communicates how we feel and how we want to be viewed.

Eye Contact

Many sayings hold that the eye is the window to the mind. This is very true to illustrating the power of eye contact in nonverbal communication. Eye contact can maintain, yield, deny and request communication between people. People who use eye contact are viewed as confident, credible and having nothing to hide.

Some important do's and do not's of eye contact are:

- If you have trouble staring someone in the eye, simply focus at something on their face**
- When speaking to a group look at everyone**
- Look at people who are key decision makers or hold power**
- Look at reactive listeners**
- Don't look at the floor, scripts or anything that causes you to tilt your head away from the receiver**
- Don't look at bad listeners that may distract you**

Body

As mentioned earlier, there are many parts of your body that add to the nonverbal message. This type of nonverbal communication is called kinesic code. It is made up of emblems, illustrators, regulators, affect displays and adapters. These behaviors are each communicated in different behaviors and movements of your body.

The first important aspect of kinesics is posture. Standing or sitting in a relaxed professional manner is a positive posture nonverbal. Also, being comfortably upright, squarely facing an audience, and evenly distributing your weight are all aspects of posture that communicate professionalism, confidence, attention to detail and organization.

Nonverbals communicated by moving the trunk of your body are called body gestures. Several different body gesture strategies are to move to change mood or pace, draw attention, or reinforce and idea. Some examples are stepping aside for a transition or stepping forward to emphasize a point.

Hand gestures are what are most often identified as nonverbal communication. One reason is because they are so obvious to a receiver and seen to be partly conscious. It is important to let your gestures flow naturally as if in conversation with a close friend. You may also use gestures to specifically describe shape and size, emphasize a point, enumerate a list, or picking out a specific item.

In conjunction with hand gestures is touching. This is a very powerful communicator especially for establishing a link to a receiver or conveying emotion. However, touching is dangerous because it invades a persons intimate space and may be perceived as unwanted or breaking norms. It is important to pay attention to the other person's nonverbal cues before deciding to initiate a touch.

The last area of physical nonverbal communication is facial expression. Facial expression is partly innate and also partly learned. Because of the number of muscles and features, such as mouth, nose, lips, cheeks, in your face, it is extremely expressive. A face can ask questions, show doubt, surprise, sadness, happiness and a wealth of other messages.

Below is a list of some body behavior and the message they communicate.

- 1) Slumped posture = low spirits
- 2) Erect posture = high spirits, energy and confidence
- 3) Lean forward = open and interested
- 4) Lean away = defensive or disinterested
- 5) Crossed arms = defensive
- 6) Uncrossed arms = willingness to listen

Sending Signals Without Words

Body language is extremely important in an interviewing situation. Some would argue that it is just as important as what you say and what is on your resume. Why? Because we can learn quite a bit about people by their non-verbal actions. This is one of the ways that an interviewer is trying to size you up as a candidate.

When we are in stressful or uncomfortable situations, many of us have habits that can be distracting to other people. Certainly biting ones nails or constantly fidgeting with ones hands could be distracting from what you are trying to say. These are examples of body language that can be harmful in an interviewing situation. Used correctly, however, body language can reinforce what you are saying and give greater impact to your statements. The following are tips to help you give the right non-verbal clues.

- **The Greeting**
- **Facial / Head Signals**
- **The Eyes**
- **The Head**
- **The Mouth**
- **The Hands**
- **Feet**
- **Seven Signals for Success**

The Greeting

Giving a "dead fish" handshake will not advance one's candidacy: neither will opposite extreme, the iron-man bone crusher grip.

The ideal handshake starts before the meeting actually occurs. Creating the right impression with the handshake is a three-step process. Be sure that:

1. Your hands are clean and adequately manicured.
2. Your hands are warm and reasonably free of perspiration. (There are a number of ways to ensure this, including washing hands in warm water at the interview site, holding one's hand close to the cheek for a few seconds, and even applying a little talcum powder.)

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3. The handshake itself is executed professionally and politely, with a firm grip and a warm smile.

Remember that if you initiate the handshake, you may send the message that you have a desire to dominate the interview; this is not a good impression to leave with one's potential boss. Better to wait a moment and allow the interviewer to initiate the shake. (If for any reason you find yourself initiating the handshake, do not pull back; if you do, you will appear indecisive. Instead, make the best of it, smile confidently, and make good eye contact.)

Use only one hand; always shake vertically. Do not extend your hand parallel to the floor, with the palm up, as this conveys submissiveness. By the same token, you may be seen as being too aggressive if you extend your flat hand outward with the palm facing down.

Facial / Head Signals

Once you take your seat, you can expect the interviewer to do most of the talking. You can also probably expect your nervousness to be at its height. Accordingly, you must be particularly careful about the nonverbal messages you send at this stage.

Now, while all parts of the body are capable of sending positive and negative signals, the head (including the eyes and mouth) is under the closest scrutiny. Most good interviewers will make an effort to establish and maintain eye contact, and thus you should expect that whatever messages you are sending from the facial region will be picked up, at least on a subliminal level.

Our language is full of expressions testifying to the powerful influence of facial signals. When we say that someone is shifty-eyed, is tight-lipped, has a furrowed brow, flashes bedroom eyes, stares into space, or grins like a Cheshire cat, we are speaking in a kind of shorthand, and using a set of stereotypes that enables us to make judgments -- consciously or unconsciously -- about a person's abilities and qualities. Those judgments may not be accurate, but they are usually difficult to reverse.

Tight smiles and tension in the facial muscles often bespeak an inability to handle stress; little eye contact can communicate a desire to hide something; pursed lips are often associated with a secretive nature; and frowning, looking sideways, or peering over one's glasses can send signals of haughtiness and arrogance. Hardly the stuff of which winning interviews are made!

The Eyes

Looking at someone means showing interest in that person, and showing interest is a giant step forward in making the right impression. (Remember, each of us is our own favorite subject!)

Your aim should be to stay with a calm, steady, and non-threatening gaze. It is easy to mismanage this, and so you may have to practice a bit to overcome the common hurdles in this area. Looking away from the interviewer for long periods while he is talking, closing your eyes while being addressed, repeatedly shifting focus from the subject to some other point: These are likely to leave the wrong impression.

Of course, there is a big difference between looking and staring at someone! Rather than looking the speaker straight-on at all times, create a mental triangle incorporating both eyes and the mouth; your eyes will follow a natural, continuous path along the three points. Maintain this approach for roughly three-quarters of the time; you can break your gaze to look at the interviewer's hands as points are emphasized, or to refer to your note pad. These techniques will allow you to leave the impression that you are attentive, sincere, and committed. Staring will only send the message that you are aggressive or belligerent.

Be wary of breaking eye contact too abruptly, and shifting your focus in ways that will disrupt the atmosphere of professionalism. Examining the interviewer below the shoulders, is a sign of over familiarity. (This is an especially important point to keep in mind when being interviewed by someone of the opposite sex.)

The eyebrows send a message as well. Under stress, one's eyebrows may wrinkle; as we have seen, this sends a negative signal about our ability to handle challenges in the business world. The best advice on this score is simply to take a deep breath and collect yourself. Most of the tension that people feel at interviews has to do with anxiety about how to respond to what the interviewer will ask. Practice responses to traditional interview questions and relax, you will do a great job.

The Head

Rapidly nodding your head can leave the impression that you are impatient and eager to add something to the conversation -- if only the interviewer would let you. Slower nodding, on the other hand, emphasizes interest, shows that you are validating the comments of your interviewer, and subtly encourages him to

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continue. Tilting the head slightly, when combined with eye contact and a natural smile, demonstrates friendliness and approachability. The tilt should be momentary and not exaggerated, almost like a bob of the head to one side. (Do not overuse this technique!)

The Mouth

One guiding principle of good body language is to turn upward rather than downward. Look at two boxers after a fight: the loser is slumped forward, brows knit and eyes downcast, while the winner's smiling face is thrust upward and outward. The victor's arms are raised high, his back is straight, his shoulders are square. In the first instance the signals we receive are those of anger, frustration, belligerence, and defeat; in the second, happiness, openness, warmth, and confidence.

Your smile is one of the most powerful positive body signals in your arsenal; it best exemplifies the up-is-best principle, as well. Offer an unforced, confident smile as frequently as opportunity and circumstances dictate. Avoid at all costs the technique that some applicants use: grinning idiotically for the length of the interview, no matter what. This will only communicate that you are either insincere or not quite on the right track.

It's worth that the mouth provides a seemingly limitless supply of opportunities to convey weakness. This may be done by touching the mouth frequently (and, typically, unconsciously); "faking" a cough when confused with a difficult question; and/or gnawing on one's lips absentmindedly. Employing any of these "insincerity signs" when you are asked about, say, why you lost your last job, will confirm or instill suspicions about your honesty and effectiveness.

The Hands

As we have seen, a confident and positive handshake breaks the ice and gets the interview moving in the right direction. Proper use of the hands throughout the rest of the interview will help to convey an above-board, "nothing-to-hide" message.

Watch out for hands and fingers that take on a life of their own, fidgeting with themselves or other objects such as pens, paper, or your hair. Pen tapping is interpreted as the action of an impatient person; this is an example of an otherwise trivial habit that can take on immense significance in an interview situation. (Rarely will an interviewer ask you to stop doing something annoying; instead, he'll simply

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make a mental note that you are an annoying person, and congratulate himself for picking this up before making the mistake of hiring you.)

The Feet

Some foot signals can have negative connotations. Women and men wearing slip-on shoes should beware of dangling the loose shoe from the toes; this can be quite distracting and, as it is a gesture often used to signal physical attraction, it has no place in a job interview. Likewise, avoid compulsive jabbing of the floor, desk, or chair with your foot; this can be perceived as a hostile and angry motion, and is likely to annoy the interviewer.

The Seven Signals for Success

So far we have focused primarily on the pitfalls to avoid; but what messages should be sent, and how? Here are seven general suggestions on good body language for the interview.

1. **Walk slowly, deliberately, and tall upon entering the room.**
2. **On greeting the interviewer, give (and, hopefully, receive) a friendly "eyebrow flash": that brief, slight raising of the brows that calls attention to the face, encourages eye contact, and (when accompanied by a natural smile) sends the strong positive signal that the interview has gotten off to a good start.**
3. **Use mirroring techniques. In other words, make an effort -- subtly! -- to reproduce the positive signals your interviewer sends. (Of course, you should never mirror negative body signals.) Say the interviewer leans forward to make a point; a few moments later, you lean forward slightly in order to hear better. Say the interviewer leans back and laughs; you "laugh beneath" the interviewer's laughter, taking care not to overwhelm your partner by using an inappropriate volume level. This technique may seem contrived at first, but you will learn that it is far from that, if only you experiment a little.**
4. **Maintain a naturally alert head position; keep your head up and your eyes front at all times.**
5. **Remember to avert your gaze from time to time so as to avoid the impression that you are staring; when you do so, look confidently and calmly to the right or left; never look down.**
6. **Do not hurry any movement.**
7. **Relax with every breath.**